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FAST-ATOM BOMBARDMENT OF MOLTEN BORON TRIOXIDE(U) NAVAL
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED		1b RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS NONE	
2a SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY UNCLASSIFIED		3 DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT UNLIMITED	
2b DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE SCALE 1 3 1987			
4 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) 02D		5 MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Naval Research Laboratory	6b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7a NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION Chemistry Division Office of the Chief of Naval Research	
6c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Washington, DC 20375-5000		7b ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Arlington, VA 22217-5000	
8a NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION ONR	8b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9 PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10 SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO 61153N	PROJECT NO RR013-01-4C
		TASK NO	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO 61-2804-0-7
11 TITLE (Include Security Classification) Fast-Atom Bombardment of Molten Boron Trioxide			
12 PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Robert J. Doyle, Jr.			
13a TYPE OF REPORT	13b TIME COVERED FROM TO	14 DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day)	15 PAGE COUNT
16 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17 COSATI CODES		18 SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	
19 ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Fast-atom bombardment mass spectra of vitreous boron trioxide (B_2O_3) has been obtained at sample temperatures below and above the melting point of B_2O_3 ($450^\circ C$). The experiments utilized a new high-temperature sample holder that has been described in detail elsewhere (1). Spectra were obtained over a sample temperature range of $150-700^\circ C$. Boron trioxide is thermally stable over this temperature range and its low vapor pressure and high viscosity assure a long lived sample and a consistent surface geometry. This technique enabled the first observation of high-molecular-weight, gas-phase boron oxides (see figure). Collision-induced dissociation of the boron oxide ions revealed structures composed of branched chains of alternating boron and oxygen atoms terminated by - B=O bonds. This observation is consistent with the structure of condensed-phase B_2O_3 , which is composed of infinite chains of BO_3 units linked by -B-O-B- bonds.			
20 DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL J.R. McDonald		22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) 21 (202) 767-3340	

OFFICE OF NAVAL RESEARCH

PROGRAM ELEMENT 61153N

TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 3

FAST-ATOM BOMBARDMENT OF MOLTEN BORON TRIOXIDE

BY

ROBERT J. DOYLE, JR.

Prepared for publication

in the

Proceedings of the 35th ASMS Conference on

Mass Spectrometry and Allied Topics


CHEMISTRY DIVISION

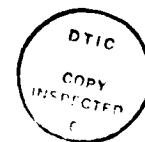
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FAST-ATOM BOMBARDMENT OF MOLTEN BORON TRIOXIDE

Robert J. Doyle, Jr.
Chemistry Division
Naval Research Laboratory
Washington, DC 20375-5000

The structure of vitreous boron trioxide (B_2O_3) has been a topic of debate for several decades. The most recently proposed structure involves a random network of boroxol (B_3O_3) rings linked together by random numbers of BO_3 triangles. The extremely low vapor pressure of B_2O_3 has, until recently, limited the utility of mass spectrometry as a structural probe. However, the advent of fast-atom bombardment-mass spectrometry (FAB-MS) now enables the desorption of potentially structurally characteristic ions from the surfaces of intractable materials.

Vitreous boron trioxide is a very hygroscopic glass that is not easily purged of water. It reacts readily with ambient water vapor to form a surface coating of boric acid ($B(OH)_3$). Even at typical FAB operating pressures (10^{-6} - 10^{-5} Torr), the residual water vapor is sufficient to provide a continuously renewable source of $B(OH)_3$ to the surface of the glass sample. Elevated sample temperatures are therefore required to both purge the sample of water and to prevent the formation of $B(OH)_3$.

Fast-atom bombardment mass spectra of vitreous boron trioxide have been obtained at elevated temperatures using a ZAB-2F mass spectrometer. The experiments utilized a new high-temperature sample holder that has been described in detail elsewhere (1). Spectra were obtained over a sample temperature range of 150-700°C. Boron trioxide is thermally stable over this temperature range and its low vapor pressure and high viscosity assure a long lived sample and a consistent surface geometry.

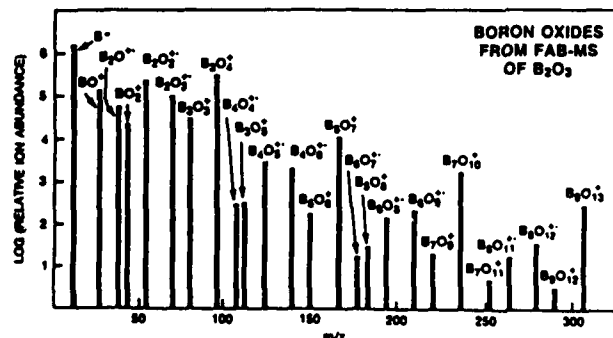


Figure 1. Boron oxide ion distribution from the FAB-MS of boron trioxide.

This technique enabled the first observation of high-molecular-weight, gas-phase boron oxides (Figure 1). The FAB-MS of vitreous B_2O_3 has yielded a complex distribution of boron oxide ions, most of which have been observed for the first time. Six groups of boron oxide ions have been identified and they may be described by six general formulae: $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n}]^+$, $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+1}]^+$, $[B_{2n+2}O_{3n+1}]^+$, $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+2}]^+$, $[B_{2n+2}O_{3n+2}]^+$, and

$[B_{2n+2}O_{3n+3}]^+$, where $n=0,1,2,3,\dots$. The maximum values of n observed are 4,6,2,3,3, and 4 respectively. Local abundance maxima are observed for $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+1}]^+$ ions which implies an enhanced stability for species such as $[B_3O_4]^+$, $[B_5O_7]^+$, $[B_7O_{10}]^+$, $[B_9O_{13}]^+$, etc.

The collision-induced dissociation (CID) mass spectra of mass-selected boron oxide ions show a remarkable similarity between the dissociation products of boron oxide ions within each group. For example, $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+1}]^+$ ions, where $n>0$, all show the loss of B_2O_3 as the principal dissociation pathway (Figure 2 a-c). On the other hand, $[B_{2n+2}O_{3n+3}]^+$ ions, where $n>0$, all show the loss of B_2O_3 as the principal dissociation pathway. Common dissociation losses can be explained in terms of structural features that are common to each group.

Although the numerous structural isomers of boron oxide ions cannot be distinguished by CID methods, the general form of boron-oxygen bonding can be deduced. For example, boron is always found 2- or 3- coordinated with oxygen. Boron oxide ions are composed of integral BO_3 triangles and terminal $-B=O$ units. Figure 2d shows examples for the $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+1}]^+$ series of ions.

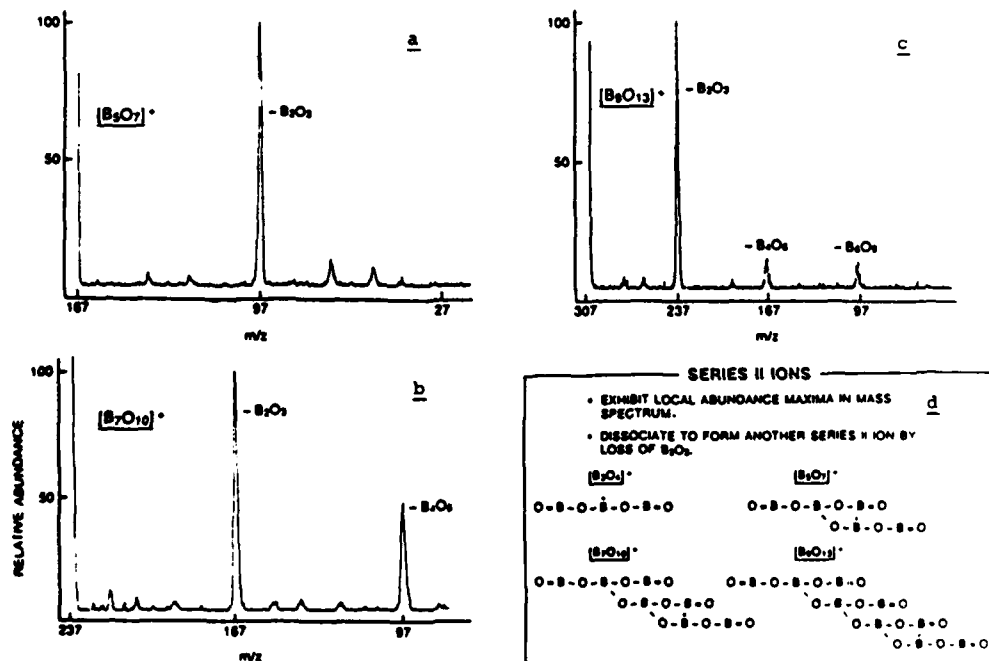


Figure 2. a-c CID spectra of $[B_{2n+1}O_{3n+1}]^+$ ions.

d Proposed structures for this series of boron oxide ions.

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